

Boss gets raise — employees get mad

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SANTA CRUZ — The spirit of Christmas may be in giving, but lower-echelon employees of the county Human Resources Agency think too much was given when their boss recently was given an 18 percent pay raise.

Supervisors Tuesday raised Administrator Gwendolyn Warren's pay from \$19.78-an-hour to \$23.33-an-hour to make her salary equitable to what other county department heads are receiving.

But employees feel the raise is uncalled for — especially at a time when workers are being laid off due to a multi-million county budget deficit.

They also are disturbed that supervisors created five higher-paid positions in the agency at a time when layoffs have become a fact of life in the county government.

"Gwendolyn Warren said we couldn't have a Christmas party this year because of the layoffs. We can't have a Christmas party, but she can get a raise," one disgruntled worker said.

"The Planning Department is going to close for a month to save money and yet they can okay administrative positions like that," another worker said of the newly-classified positions approved Tuesday.

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coastal protection plan. The department lost its appeal and is considering Keegan of Ottaway News Service.

Employees get mad

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Dozens of workers expressed their dissatisfaction to The Sentinel this week, all asking that their names not be revealed for fear of losing their jobs.

But the workers went on record Thursday night at a union meeting. The members of Local 415 of the Service Employees International Union authorized their leaders to request a meeting with the Board of Supervisors to discuss the union's concerns over Warren's pay increase.

The members also want their leadership to request that any necessary job cuts due to the budget crisis be distributed evenly between management and non-management employees.

Warren was out of her office until Tuesday, but did comment earlier this week that she didn't understand why she has become the center of controversy and why she is receiving "hate mail."

Workers in the welfare, food stamp and Medi-Call offices all came under Warren's leadership slightly more than one year ago when their department was merged with the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program into what's now called the Human Resources Agency.

Warren, the former head of CETA, was chosen to run the new agency.

Employees said it was ironic that at a time when Warren is getting a pay raise and higher-paid managerial positions, a paper is being circulated through their offices asking opinions on taking a cut in pay to avoid more layoffs.

"It is very interesting that at a time they are asking us to look for ways to cut back in expenditures and to take a cut in pay, they are giving themselves raises," one employee commented.

The management has gone so far as to ask workers to only use three writing implements — a blue pen, a red pen and a pencil to cut costs, and yet raises are being given, another employee said.

Besides Warren's raise — which will cost about \$3,692 for the remaining six months of the fiscal year — supervisors also gave two existing agency managers raises in approving the new job classifications.

Ernest Lopez will move into the newly-created position of director of services-HRA at a 15.2 percent salary increase and Laureen Swan now becomes deputy director of services-HRA at a 4.7 percent increase, according to Agency Personnel Director Jim De Alba.

The other three positions classified include a senior human resources analyst, an assistant human resources analyst and an associate human resources analyst.

Only two of these positions will be filled when the economy improves, De Alba said. The senior analyst and either an associate or assistant analyst will eventually be hired, he said.

Employees are upset with these higher-paid positions not only because they come during hard times, but also because they believe the agency is top-heavy in management.

"It appears to me this agency now operates with secrecy, fear, outright lies and contradictions and there appears to be a definite feather-bedding of middle-management employees," one agency supervisor said.

Many employees also wondered aloud why so many analysts are needed when their low-income clients are suffering because there aren't enough workers to serve them.

"Isn't it outrageous that when we have so much unemployment, she gets a raise? Ever since we integrated with CETA, we have no idea what those analysts are doing, what those positions are for," an employee said.

Employees also claim Warren has put former CETA workers, with no experience in social services, into management positions and hasn't promoted former Social Services Department workers.

"Older employees, people who want to get ahead, can't move up. The CETA people are getting all the management positions," one older woman employee said.

Employees also said they were shocked to read about the raise in the newspaper, having no indication it was coming before supervisors.

They questioned the motives of County Administrative Officer George Newell in adding the item to the agenda late Tuesday afternoon.

But chief county budget analyst, Pat Busch, said there was no intention to hide anything.

"The work on it wasn't completed until late in the day and there was no opportunity left this year to make the change," Busch said.

Newell was out of his office and unavailable for comment.